

# Gettysburg / Learning Activities

## #1. Life in a Free Black Community Before the Civil War

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#### #1. Choose and develop a character.

A. Get to know Gettysburg in 1863. Read about...

- The town's African American community
- The Landscape and its impact upon the town's economy & history

*[see Explore the Setting]*

B. Choose a character that you will portray through the battle and after.

- Basil Biggs
- Abraham Brien
- Mag Palm
- Lloyd Watts
- Owen Robinson

*[All appear in the Overview Slideshow]*

C. What can you learn about your character's life from the historical record? Piece together as much as you can to answer these questions:

- Where am I from?
- How do I make a living?

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## #1. Life in a Free Black Community Before the Civil War (cont'd)

- Speculate: Why might I have come to Gettysburg?

D. Discuss with your partners:

- Gettysburg's location seven miles from the Mason-Dixon line made free blacks living there a target for slave hunters and other dangers. Why would African Americans have settled in Gettysburg in the pre-war era?
- What institutions, skills, and values are evident in the black community of Gettysburg?

E. Write an autobiographical sketch of your character.

It's the eve of the battle of Gettysburg. Feel free to make inferences and speculations to make your character human. Consider the following questions as a guide:

- Where were you born and why did you come to Gettysburg?
- Are you married? Do you have children?
- Do you enjoy your job?
- How are you involved in your community?
- Do you feel secure or nervous about living in Gettysburg?
- What are your hopes for the future?

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### **#1. Life in a Free Black Community Before the Civil War** (cont'd)

Here's a sample autobiography of JOHN HOPKINS, JANITOR:

"I was born in Maryland in 1820, but moved to Pennsylvania, a land where I could live in greater freedom and get a better job. There I met my wife Julia, and we had two sons. In Pennsylvania they could be educated, and my wife and I hope that by going to school they will have opportunities that we never did. I work as the janitor at Pennsylvania College, where I keep the classrooms clean and the fires lit. I also ring the bell to call students to class. Seeing these students on a daily basis I have learned the importance of education, and I try to emphasize that fact to my sons. My wife and I saved our pennies and bought a house in town, but when the college gave me living quarters on campus, we rented out our house in town for extra income."